

# Supervisors and change communications

Well-designed and implemented communications are a particularly important support measure in a change situation. The purpose of change communication is to create an understanding of the importance, objectives and implementation of change in the work community and to strengthen it. This requires communications, interaction, encounters, experiences of inclusion and a common language.

In change situations, the supervisor's role in open, regular, clear and trusting communications and interaction is emphasised. The aim of this leaflet is to compile good practices and noteworthy perspectives that supervisors can benefit from.

## Communications plan

If a communications plan related to the change has been made at the workplace, it is important that each supervisor commits to the jointly agreed policies and contents. The supervisor may also propose the preparation of a communications plan in connection with a larger change.

When drawing up the plan, the following should be considered:

- What is being communicated and at what stage?
- How are the communications coordinated? What is the division of responsibilities between the different actors in the communications? (Management, each supervisor, personnel representatives?)



- Whom are the communications targeted at? What do the different groups need information about? What needs to be communicated to the different groups?
- How, with what tools and at what frequency will the communications take place? How is it ensured that everyone receives the necessary information? How is information overload prevented?
- What is the policy for acting in unpredictable situations?
- How is employee participation organised throughout the different stages of the change? What kinds of methods or ways of working are used?
- What kinds of materials are needed to support the communications and employee participation?
- Who will respond to questions? What is the division of responsibilities between the different operators?
- Where can supervisors get support in matters related to communications?

If there is no communications plan, the supervisor should discuss and agree on communications practices with the people working in their area of responsibility.

## Outline the whole picture and the current situation

Obtain a sufficient amount of up-to-date information on the progress of the change and its causes, objective and methods of implementation. Filter out the irrelevant information from the perspective of your area of responsibility.

Structure the progress of the change. You can illustrate it by using a timeline or chart. Keep an up-to-date presentation and make use of it at meetings, for example. Think about how you could take advantage of visualisation opportunities, such as videos, images, stories, word clouds and mind maps also otherwise.

Regularly stop to think about what you could say at each stage of the change.

Try to anticipate things when possible, but also be prepared for surprises. Changes do not always go according to plan, and corrections may be needed. Be aware that, in most cases, the time required for implementing the change is underestimated.

Keep in mind that, in the midst of change, you need routines and continuity. One way to do this is through regular communications and regular, more frequent meetings.

Take advantage of the support opportunities available, such as peer support, your supervisor, HR, occupational health care as well as the occupational safety manager and the occupational safety representative.

### **Communicate regularly and clearly**

Explain the objective and methods of implementation of the change from the point of view of the work in an understandable and clear manner; for example, how the change can help in the implementation of the core task of the unit or team. Try to explain things in a way that minimises the possibility of misinterpretation. However, do not oversimplify things. If you use written communications, such as emails or newsletters, you can ask a colleague for feedback on your message before sending it.



Pace the communications according to the progress of the change. Try to avoid information overload, so that relevant information is not lost.

Repeat the key points often enough. Explain the solutions and choices, reviewing them if necessary. Use possible policies and issues discussed in co-operation as support. You can invite an employee representative, such as an occupational safety representative, to attend a unit or team meeting, but remember that your role is to act as the employer's representative.

Communicate clearly on the decisions related to the different stages of the change and their impact as soon as possible. Explain everything you can. If you do not know or have permission to explain something or if something has not yet been decided, also say that out loud.

Speak frankly. Share any bad news face-to-face and without beating about the bush, excuses, belittling or embellishment.

Make sure that no one working in your area of responsibility is left outside the communications and interaction. Keep an eye out for the formation of possible internal or external circles.

### **Know your group and its members**

Identify what kinds of individuals work in your area of responsibility. Try to establish an idea of what kinds of change experiences they have had in the past. Also consider your own experiences of change and how they may affect your own actions in the current change situation.

Observe everyone's ability to work and function, especially in larger changes. Intervene in a positive way as early as possible. Take advantage of the support opportunities offered by the occupational health care. Also identify if, for example, someone is in danger of becoming marginalised in the work community.

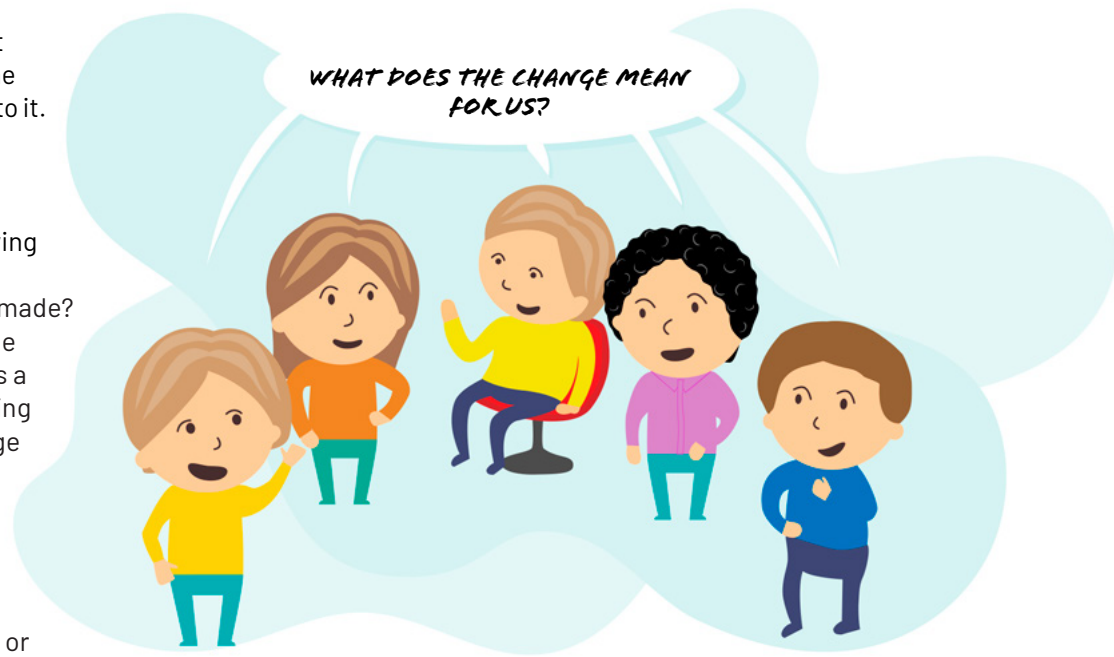
Ensure that everyone receives the information they need. Consider people's needs, desires, opinions and feelings.

Remember that people do not internalise change at the same pace, adapt to it and commit to it.

### Prepare for meetings

In particular, be prepared to discuss and share the following questions:

- Why is the change being made? What is the purpose of the change? For what issue is a solution or procedure being sought? Why is the change necessary?
- What options were explored? What led to the option being chosen?
- How can the change help or benefit us, our customers and our stakeholders?
- What does the change mean for your operations? What will change, how will it change and when will it change? What should be done differently in the future? And what needs to be continued, added or confirmed?
- What does the change mean for everyone's work?
- What competencies do we need more of? How will the competence of the employees be strengthened or expanded during the change?
- How will the change process proceed? How is the progress in the change being communicated? What is the next step?
- What influencing opportunities do we have throughout the different stages of the change? How and when could the influencing take place? What cannot be influenced, and how could we act so that the changes do not constitute a harmful load?
- Where could we get help and support as a group and as individuals? How could we support and help each other?
- How and when will the progress of the change be assessed?



- How and when will the final results of the change be assessed? What about its effects, for example, on well-being at work?

Also discuss together what kinds of change projects you have gone through so far and what you have learned from them.

### Be reachable and present

Be present in everyday work as much as possible. Do not shy away from unpleasant encounters, even if they can feel difficult at times. Acquire the skills to handle them.

Create enough opportunities for one-to-one conversations, including confidential ones, with you. This is one of the main duties of a supervisor in a change situation.

Try to convey a sense of calmness and confidence in the future. Listen to yourself so that you do not unknowingly look worried, discouraged or busy, for example.

Listen more than you talk. Monitor yourself: What kind of listener am I? Learn to tolerate silence.

Also participate in informal discussions. At meetings, listen to what is going on, what issues related to the change are being talked about and how they are being talked about. In particular, listen to what matters raise concerns.

Stop misunderstandings, misinterpretations, misconceptions and harmful rumours in their tracks. That way, you can help to prevent unnecessary worries and fears from spreading. For example, you can ask the other person to tell you what they heard you say.

Strive to improve your sense of control. Constructively guide the group or individual to focus on the issues that they can influence. Take advantage of the three circles of influence. Try to keep the conversations forward-looking.

Receive feedback and identify with whom it would be appropriate to handle it. Communicate your concerns and questions about your area of responsibility up the chain of command.

### Create opportunities for discussion

Plan meetings and provide opportunities to address the change. Consistent understanding of the change requires discussions with others and opportunities to ask questions.

Help to highlight different perspectives, concerns and positive aspects. The personnel is one of the key sources of information at different stages of the change. Appreciate the views they present.

In the preparations, take into account different working arrangements, such as part-time work, hybrid work, multi-location work and shift work.

It is possible to discuss things in small groups. Make use of the Centre for Occupational Safety's **Working Together: A Handbook**. Find out where you can get support for facilitating group discussions, if necessary.

Take into account individual differences. Remember that not everyone has the same capacity to participate, for example, in quick brainstorming or sharing of personal views. Give enough time to think.

Leave room for questions, including immediate ones. Respond to questions in a considerate and clear manner. If you do not know or cannot answer something, please say so: "I don't know, but I'll find out."



"This hasn't been decided yet." or "I don't have permission to elaborate at this stage. I promise to get back to you as soon as possible." Accept that these are responses that you will have to give from time to time.

Encourage questions and the sharing of findings, concerns and successes. Appreciate trying something new. Consider how you can strengthen the psychological safety of the work community, confidence in the future and the sharing of information and competence through your own actions.

**// Open dialogue is needed, and you can never have too much of it.**

(Riitta Viitala 2020a, 28.)

### Help with the regulation of emotions

Be aware that emotions are also present at work and that they have

an impact on information processing, such as observation, receiving information and learning. In addition, everyone's own characteristics and resources influence how they interpret and react in different situations.

Give reasonable room for people to express their emotions. Remember that change can evoke all kinds of emotions: from disbelief and fear to excitement and relief. The bigger the change or the more meaningful it is perceived to be on a personal level, the more likely it is that it can be perceived as a threat, especially in the early stages. This may be based, for example, on concerns about one's livelihood, changes to one's own position, the adequacy of one's competence in the future, the breakdown of the work community, ignorance or previous experiences of change situations.

Note that resistance to change is not a bad thing, as it often reveals things that might otherwise be left unattended.

If necessary, together with the work community, create a course of action whereby, for example, frustrations can be vented safely and in moderation.

Consider how you can strengthen the resilience of the group and its members with your own actions.

Identify and accept your own feelings about change, such as uncertainty.

**PARALYSIS**  
wistfulness  
frustration  
hesitation  
**JOY**

CONFUSION

excitement  
uncertainty  
satisfaction  
irritation

**FEAR**

// Work community in change = knowledge x understanding x influencing x experience of participation  
(Elisa Juholin 2002, 139.)

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